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UNCLAS CHIANG MAI 000035

SIPDIS

TAGS: PGOV TH TRT

SUBJECT: THAKSIN TRIES TO REGROUP, RALLY SUPPORT IN NORTH

REP: BANGKOK 706

¶1. SUMMARY. Mounting corruption charges against Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra may be causing Bangkok's urban elites and middle class to lo

¶2. With tens of thousands of protesters calling for his resignation in Bangkok this past weekend (see reftel), Thaksin took refuge on his home turf in the north, looking to shore up support among som

¶3. The long weekend up north began for Thaksin with a policy focus, as he led foreign diplomats on a tour of refugee camps in Tak province and now prepares for a mobile cabinet meeting this week in Chiang

¶4. The events however were less an outpouring of support for Thaksin than they were an orchestrated campaign by TRT operatives. Local media claimed participants at a 400-person rally (about half what the

¶5. Consulate contacts tell us that there is little desire

among all levels of northern society to see Thaksin resign.

Although he is less popular here overall than he was one year ago after his landslide electoral victory, many cite the lack of a viable or desi

¶6. Moreover, one consulate contact pointed out that many

Thais, especially northerners, tend to side with an underdog.

With throngs of Bangkok protesters and disenfranchised former allies demanding his resignation, Thaksin - despite still holding a comfortable n

countrywide: the underdog fighting back against rich urban elites.

MURPHY